

FBI Moves Against King Called Unethical

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former FBI official says the bureau's 10-year campaign against Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was unethical and an abuse of power. But he denies that it contributed to King's assassination.

Charles D. Brennan also acknowledged Friday to the House Assassinations Committee that top FBI officials gave almost no thought to investigating the possibility of conspiracy after the April 4, 1968, murder of King in Memphis, Tenn.

Committee Chairman Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, and Rep. Floyd J. Fithian, D-Ind., asked Brennan if he thought that the late J. Edgar Hoover's denunciation of King and the FBI's dissemination of allegations about King might have created a climate that led someone to kill the civil rights leader.

"You don't see, even now, that you might have so poisoned the atmosphere that could cause somebody, not the FBI, but somebody, to pull the trigger?" Fithian asked.

Brennan said it is almost impossible

to determine all of the things that motivate an assassin, but that he has never heard a suggestion that FBI harassment of King led directly to his murder.

At the time of King's assassination, Brennan had for two years been chief of the internal security section that conducted the campaign against King.

Brennan would not accept Stokes' characterization that the FBI effort to discredit King as a civil rights leader was "illegal, immoral and unconstitutional."

"It was unethical," Brennan said, adding later: "It was an abuse of power."

Brennan said he still believes that the initial FBI investigation, approved by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to determine whether King was falling under communist influence, was justified.

"Where the whole thing got off the track, really, was when it got into Dr. King's personal life," he said.

Brennan said the investigation was justified because FBI officials were

afraid communists might be able to influence King away from non-violence and turn his thousands of followers instead to black militancy.

Earlier Friday, a former Atlanta FBI agent, Arthur Murtaugh, said the bureau conducted a vendetta against King and then botched its investigation of his assassination by not looking into the possibility of conspiracy.

Murtaugh said the same FBI intelligence agents who had conducted the operation against King also conducted the assassination investigation.

"It just defies reason to say that the same people who have engaged in a 10-year vendetta against King should investigate his murder," added Murtaugh, who twice broke down in tears during his testimony.

Brennan said the FBI put its efforts back on a routine basis after James Earl Ray was identified as the suspected assassin and a fugitive to be caught.

"I never gave it any thought as a possible conspiracy," Brennan said. "It appeared to me they had immediately

solved the case so that there was no need to investigate further."

The committee reported Friday that it had found no evidence to support a charge that a squad of off-duty FBI agents had assassinated King.

And Walter Fauntroy, the delegate in the House from the District of Columbia and a member of the committee, denounced lawyer Mark Lane as a spiteful "consummate pitchman."

Fauntroy denied Lane's allegation that Fauntroy had said the panel had evidence that King had been murdered by an FBI assassination squad. U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young was called before the committee as a surprise witness to testify that Fauntroy had not told him of an alleged FBI assassination squad, as Lane charges.

Lane has written books on the murders of both King and President John F. Kennedy. Lane also has appeared before the House committee on behalf of James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty of King's murder but subsequently recanted the confession.

St. Louis Post-Dispatch 11/18/78